# Monmouthshire County Council

Aligning the Levers of Change – Current Successes and Remaining Challenges

Date: June 2018

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# Overall conclusion

The Council is keen to innovate to achieve the potential benefits of shared services and technological approaches, and learn lessons from recent projects and experiences to help it further improve.

# What we did

- Thematic review 'Aligning the Levers of Change – Current Successes and Remaining Challenges'.

- Agreed with the Chief Executive that in Monmouthshire CC we would focus the work on 'whether, and if so how the Council should engage with other bodies in shared service arrangements or adopt new technological approaches'.

- Four focus groups:
  - Operational managers
  - Middle managers
  - Wider Corporate Leadership Team
  - Members

- This presentation summarises the views expressed.

# We asked about the Council's track record of entering into shared services

- Shared Resource Service – IT.
- Shared Housing Benefit Service with Torfaen.
- Community Hubs.

# …..and of adopting new technological approaches

- Online applications – Gov UK.

- Agile working – greater reliance on technology.

- Mobile worker service to report fly tipping and put customers in touch directly with waste operatives.

- Real time recording of waste bins not put out for collection.

- Reporting systems through the 'My Monmouthshire App'.

- Human Resources Team introduced self service pay slips and e-forms.

- Contractor upload photographs of their work.

- Building surveyors work in the field using technology.

- 'Digital day' held to showcase opportunities – apps etc.

# We asked participants what general lessons the Council has learnt from entering into shared services and adopting new technology

The Council needs to:

- clarify the intended benefits and any dis-benefits from the arrangement – due diligence.

- be realistic – don't overpromise – manage expectations.

- agree mechanisms for changes at the outset.

- free up the resources to plan and implement the change.

- recognise that if staff are implementing change, they can't do all of their day job – things might stop or be delayed.

- be mindful of the impact on service users/residents.

- factor in training – sometimes may need to close services for training.

- recognise that shared services and new technology mean that things will be different. Managers need to manage this.

# We asked participants what the Council has learnt from entering into shared services

- Agree clear contact arrangements – ideally single point of contact.

- Shared services can promote wider partnership working.

- Sometimes decisions taken will not suit Monmouthshire CC.

- Partners may receive the same service but may all pay differently.

- Shared services can prevent the Council making cost savings.

- Need to try to get others to buy into changes to keep costs down.

- Culture can be a barrier – SRS has a common platform. Many people are protective of their own systems – reluctant to share. Some feel threatened by partners, and threaten to leave the partnerships if they don't get their own way.

# …..and of adopting new technological approaches

- Check that the technology is affordable.
- Some people won't/can't use technology – how will the Council cater for their needs?
- Don't lose 'people' time by automation.
- Systems will fail – what are the implications and plan 'B's.
- Access to systems can be a problem – need a quick resolution.
- Shared IT systems – one size rarely 'fits all' – modifications can be expensive.
- Too many systems don't talk to each other.
- Use systems soon after training then support if people struggle.
- Issue guides/videos to support users.

# We asked about potential opportunities to test out new approaches to shared services and adopt new technological approaches

- Online payments.
- Voice recognition software.
- Customer services – channel choice, eg Chatbot, Alexa.
- Mobile worker service – app could it be used for potholes etc.
- Could Alexa book leave, inform when the next bus is due or waste is due for collection.
- More use of skype and video conferencing and calls.
- Fingerprint technology for school meals.
- Regional working is encouraged by the Welsh Government and is likely to result in more shared services.

# We asked how the organisation needs to change to get the most from shared services and new technological approaches

- Clarify resources – can the Council afford to invest to save?

- Clarify the Council's attitude to risk – measured or averse?

- Review evidence and data needs to test their robustness.

- Empower staff – some good ideas come from across the organisation and this can increase commitment across the Council.

- Avoid short-term fixes – development costs can be high so use them to best effect.

- Learn – from others and from within the Council.

- Recruit for the future – skills/aptitude/creative problem solving.

- Member caseload management system.

- Chatbot approach to help councillors find out which officers to contact with enquiries.

- Electronic voting and meetings added automatically into calendars.

# We asked about the challenges/potential obstacles to progressing these developments

- Potential weight of failure – because failure costs.

- Organisational changes need to be guided by the Sustainable Development Principle.

- Political cycle is five yearly – how does this affect longer-term planning and commitment.

- Digital literacy of some of the workforce and members – are they ready for and receptive to new technological changes?

# Some concluding questions

- Were you using social media 15 years ago?
- What sort of technologies will you be using in 10 to 15 years?
- How can you create a culture, risk appetite and systems that are open to and maximise the potential of new technology?

- What services were shared 10 to 15 years ago?
- Are shared services working for you now by delivering the intended benefits?
- What services will be shared and what services will Monmouthshire be providing itself in 10 to 15 years?

What will the future hold and how will you get there?